

Chapter 11

Teaching Students to Harness Their Anxiety and Maintain Well-Being in the Period Leading to and During Important Exams: Using Well-Being and Neuroscience Findings for the Appropriate Mental Preparation

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ABSTRACT

Standard-based tests are a common form of final assessment in secondary education worldwide, but they pose many challenges for students. They require not only academic competence, but also mental resilience, which is rarely instructed in school. This chapter argues for the inclusion of strong mental training during revision. For this, it will review the history and rationale of standard-based assessments, and how they relate to the political and social aspects of different countries. It will also examine the controversies and criticisms of this form of evaluation, and how it affects the students' emotions and perspectives. The chapter will then suggest some practical strategies that teachers can use in the classroom to foster a holistic approach to learning. These strategies include mindfulness exercises, collaboration activities, feedback mechanisms, and the facilitation of healthy habits.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-2833-0.ch011

INTRODUCTION

Standard-based tests are a prevalent form of final assessment in secondary education around the world, but they also entail many challenges for students who need to show not only their academic competence, but also their mental strengths. These tests demand both a good command of the knowledge and skills taught during the lessons and also a strong mental resilience that is often not addressed in school. This paper will advocate for the inclusion of such practice in the general education context.

The paper will draw on the recent progress in brain imagery that has enabled scientists to make significant advances in understanding how the brain functions and how we can control our emotions. These findings have had a remarkable impact on various domains, including some unexpected ones. In areas such as sports, public speaking, performing arts, etc., athletes, politicians, and performers have adopted the use of mental coaches as part of their training and have improved their results considerably (Svoboda, 2021). It is now widely acknowledged that practice alone is not enough to achieve success; one also needs to comprehend their mental processes and train them to respond appropriately under any situation, even the most stressful ones. As TED-Ed (2018a) puts it, one needs to prevent “choking in the critical moment”. This paper will suggest applying similar techniques to the educational setting, especially during the exam preparation and delivery phases.

To support this claim, the paper will first review the history and rationale of standard-based assessments, and how they are related to the political and social aspects of different countries. It will also examine the controversies and criticisms that surround this form of evaluation, and how it affects the students’ perspectives and emotions. The paper will then propose some practical strategies that teachers can implement in the classroom and during exam preparation to foster a holistic approach to learning. These strategies include mindfulness exercises, collaboration activities, feedback mechanisms, and healthy habits. These techniques should help students identify their emotions and their readiness for exams, lower their anxiety and increase their motivation, distinguish the elements that trigger their stress, and find time to keep a healthy life and brain efficiency. The paper will argue that these strategies should help students develop the mental strength needed to overcome the fear generated by high-stakes exams and keep their stress and anxiety under control throughout the period.

The paper will conclude by discussing the implications and limitations of these strategies, and suggesting some directions for future research.

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Harari (2018) divided the life of older generations into three stages. The first stage was the education period, where people “accumulated information, developed skills, constructed a world view, and built a stable identity”. This period prepared them for the second stage, where they “relied on (their) accumulated skills to navigate the world, earn a living, and contribute to society...”. High-stakes, standardized, and end-of-cycle tests have been essential components of this societal structure. They were based on the

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